

Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Interview with Radio Free Europe Macedonian Language Service

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Mr. Hill, after the engagement in the Balkans you are now focused on East Asia and the Pacific. You are directly involved in the negotiations with the regime in Pyongyang. Will you give us an update on the nuclear disarmament talks?

We are in the middle of a very difficult step-by-step process involving denuclearization of North Korea. We are involved in a step-by-step basis because the North Koreans did not want to just easily denuclearize, so we are trying to do it on a basis that they take some small steps, we take some small steps to help them, they take some additional steps, and we take some steps. We call that action-for-action. So, we are making some progress, but we have a long way to go. The progress is if they have shut down their nuclear facilities so they are not producing more plutonium. What we still have to do is get them to give us – turn over to the international community - the plutonium they have already produced and to do that in a way that is verifiable so that we know precisely how much plutonium they have and how much they need to turn over.

Do you believe that a success model in North Korea could be used in the talks with Iran?

I don't know. Every situation like this is very different, so I think you have to be careful not to draw too many parallels between North Korea and Iran. I think you have to respect the differences and the situations.

Is it hard to reach consensus in the Security Council? What are the interests of China and Russia?

We work together with China and Russia in something called the Six-Party Talks. China is in the chair of our process. I think that what is important about our process is that everybody shares the same goal of denuclearizing North Korea. No one wants North Korea to have nuclear weapons. So, we have the same goal, but the challenge is in trying to synchronize the tactics that we pursue in order to achieve this goal.

Are there chances for nuclear weapons to get possessed by terrorist organizations?

I think everybody who is involved in these nuclear talks is always concerned that the more nuclear material there is out here in the world, the more chance there is for terrorists to put their hands on it. So, we want to make sure that we can reduce the amount of nuclear material out there and in particular to reduce the number of countries, especially countries that are pursuing these weapons outside of any international norms. We want to make sure that we can stop that and reverse it.

In a relatively short period of time you are receiving a second award, the honorary citizen plaque for your contribution to strengthening Skopje and Macedonia's international position? What do these awards from Macedonia mean to you?

First of all, I am very honored to receive this award. It truly was very good news for me when I was informed that the City decided to give me an award here. I very much enjoyed my time here, I very much enjoyed my living in Skopje, so I was, as I said, very honored. It is not the only reason that I come back to Macedonia. I do not need an award to come back to Macedonia. I really enjoy, I have many friends in this country, I really enjoy my stay here and look forward to coming back in the future even if I am not receiving any kind of award.

You were in Macedonia during a really important and hard time for the country. From this perspective, how do you see Macedonia today and how do you see the country in the future?

In some respects the situation now is better for Macedonia. It is not a country that is bordering a country where there is a war going on at the other side of the border. That said there are new challenges for Macedonia and I think there will be continued challenges for Macedonia, but I think that as long as there is this consensus on where Macedonia should go, that is, toward NATO, toward the European Union, I think that Macedonia will have a good future. The United States, as a good friend of Macedonia, will try to assist Macedonia on the way. Today I had the opportunity to visit this new American Embassy, which I think will be a very beautiful embassy in Skopje. I hope that people in Skopje will look at this Embassy as a symbol of the America's commitment to the long-term good relationship with this country.

Is there any advice that you would like to give to our politicians in this situation?

I think that it is important that diplomats not be giving advice to politicians. We are in a different line of work. They have their work, I have my work. What I would like to do is share experiences with them and have good dialogue with them but I think there is probably too much advice being given in the world.

Thank you very much.